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UNICEF'S 1994 REPORT ON THE STATE OF CHILDREN

RICHARD REID, Director of the Division of Public Affairs for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), discusses the 1994 "State of the World's Children" report. There are three major problems affecting the progress of children: poverty, population growth and environmental deterioration. If the world continues to neglect these problems, the result will be devastating to society in general and to children in particular. Since the 1990 Children's World Summit, spectacular gains have been made against the common diseases of children. Immunization and oral rehydration are today saving more than 4 million young lives each year. Mr. Reid believes that sanctions imposed by the International Community often miss their intended target and cause hardship and suffering among children.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Over the last decade, remarkable progress has been made against several of the most specific threats to the health and well-being of children in many parts of the world. However, long-term problems of poverty, population growth and environmental deterioration are still jeopardizing the efforts to end malnutrition, illiteracy and disease among children.

A recently published report by the United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF, concludes that a renewed effort to invest in the health, nutrition and education of all children is indispensable for coping with such problems and managing the transition to a sustainable future. With us today to discuss this new report, "The State of the World's Children 1994", is Richard Reid, Director of UNICEF's Division for Public Affairs. Joining me to speak with Mr. Reid are Ricardo Alday of the Mexican News Agency and Victoria Graham of the Associated Press.

Mr. Reid, welcome to World Chronicle.

REID: Thank you, Michael.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Reid, it's obviously impossible for us to deal adequately in a 28-minute program with a big report like this, which is very comprehensive in its treatment of the problem. I wonder if you could, just to help us out, go over some of the highlights of the report as you see them.

REID: I think you put it very well in your summary. The three main elements of this year's "State of the World's Children" report are population growth, poverty and environmental deterioration.

LITTLEJOHNS: Which you refer to as the PPE.

REID: The PPE spiral, because they tend to reinforce one another in a downward spiral. Poverty inevitably means that people will have more children, because there's so much sickness and so much death among poor families. As a consequence, the population increase is spurred by these additional children. More population means more poverty, because there will be further unemployment. And it also means that both of these, both population and poverty, are going to impact very seriously on the

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environment, because there will be so much less space to farm, because so much more pressure will be put on the biosphere by people that need to move to hillsides and to rain forests and to the edges of deserts to try to eke out an agricultural living. And so these three, the PPE -- population, poverty and environment -- are what we talk about in this year's "State of the World's Children" report against the reflecting mirror of the linkage between them and the conditions of children.

We feel, and I think we state in this report, that there is no surer way of overcoming the problems of population growth, poverty and environmental deterioration than also overcoming illiteracy, disease and malnutrition among children. We feel that if these three are tackled -- and they can be tackled so cheaply, and there are so many encouraging evidences that the job of taking care of them is going on apace in the world -- that there's a good chance, we think, that many countries can do what the South Koreas and Taiwans and Thailands and other countries have done in laying a base of absolutely solid population capability by making sure that there are enough nutritional supplements for every child, girl and boy in the population; to make sure that his and her brain growth and physical growth are perfect; to make sure that they get excellent numeracy and literacy in their primary school particularly; and to make sure that there's a health system that is there to take care of in a primary fashion the diseases that will hit kids when they're young, because our species is such a fragile, perishable one. In the whole phylogenetic tree, there isn't another species that takes so long to mature and whose young are so vulnerable so long.

LITTLEJOHNS: Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, which was organized by UNICEF and was attended by --

REID: Seventy-one heads of state.

LITTLEJOHNS: President Bush was there. President Salinas, I think, was there. And 71, as you say, heads of state and government. What are the main areas of progress that have been recorded since that event?

REID: There have been several. I guess if we looked at it globally, probably the best way to talk cumulatively of it is to say that we now have 4 million fewer children dying from preventable causes each year than we did even in the late 1980s. And the main reasons for that are a handful. In the health area, one of them is immunization, especially immunization against measles. We're saving now 2.5 million children's lives a year by measles vaccination. Of the childhood killer diseases that are vaccine preventable, there are six, but the three worst are measles and whooping cough and

tetanus. And of the second two, whooping cough and tetanus, there's also been a good advance. The main killer of children perennially has been the dehydration of diarrhoea -- simple diarrhoea, which to an adult is mild and really nothing, but to a little child, it can kill them in less than a day because of the salts and the electrolytes and the fluids that are leached out of their systems. We're 70 per cent water anyway and when we lose it, when a child loses it, he's gone. And there too we're saving now more than a million children's lives a year than we did just a few years ago. So that 4 million is terrific progress, but we see no reason why that shouldn't be 7 million. Easily attainable if some of the other things such as the upper respiratory infections, pneumonia especially, are tackled in the same way.

ALDAY: Besides this health progress we have just referred to regarding the Children's Summit, it's my impression that there are many other areas in which there were committed hundreds of proposals, and we have limited concrete results. Besides the Children's Summit, we had the Environmental Summit in 1992, from which again we have hundreds of commitments, but limited results. What can you expect? This year we will have the Population Summit and next year we will have the Social Development Summit.

REID: And also the Women's Summit in Beijing.

ALDAY: So what are you expecting, since the children viewpoint?

REID: We like management by objectives in UNICEF --

LITTLEJOHNS: Say again, you like what?

REID: Management by objectives: having goals that you have to attain, time-bound goals and en route targets toward those goals. And we're accustomed to meeting them. Now, out of the World Summit for Children, there were 20 targets, some of them in the field of education, some of them in the field of water and sanitation, some in nutrition, some in maternal health, most of them in child health. We're marching toward those goals -- they're all for the year 2000 -- at a pretty good pace. And one way we're trying to make sure that we get to those year-2000 goals is by holding ourselves accountable at the end of '95 for what we call the mid-decade goals -- the basic ones of the 20, 10 that are the most fundamental, and making sure that we get to them by the end of '95 to prove that we're on pace. Just like a distance runner, if you're trying to do a four-minute mile and at the half mile you're at two minutes and 30 seconds, you'll never make the four-minute mile. So we're hoping with these mid-decade goals to do it.

LITTLEJOHNS: So how many have you hit so far?

REID: Well, we're only three years into the decade, and we have a couple of them that are really quite near. One of them is the elimination of the main cause of mental retardation in the world, which is iodine deficiency. There are 100 million children that are affected by this mental retardation that comes from it, and among those, there are tens of thousands of cretins, children with such a huge IQ deficit that they can't possibly function. That's one. The elimination of guinea worm disease is another, and I'm sure that the goal of the 95 per cent coverage of measles will also be attained.

LITTLEJOHNS: Guinea worm is a big problem in Africa.

REID: Yes, it is. It strikes at the agricultural output of many countries. It's still prevalent in 23 countries.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is it a killer?

REID: No. But it lays you up in a painful way, in such a fashion as to really bring down productivity. And there are some villages in Nigeria and Ghana where 80 per cent of the farmers can't get out and do what they should be doing at the critical time of the year because of guinea worm, and many, many children can't go to school.

GRAHAM: Mr. Reid, since 1990 and the Children's Summit, we've seen a dramatic increase in wars -- civil wars and ethnic strife of all kinds. I don't think that the war in Bosnia had broken out then. And certainly children have been caught in all these conflicts. Could you tell us a little bit about what's going on and what's happening to the child victims?

REID: Well, there's no question that the outbreak of all these ethnic conflicts and civil wars has had a terrific negative impact on the lives of children. In one 12-month period that we calculated toward the end of 1992, it was our estimate that 500 thousand children, a half a million children had died as a result of these wars. But the interesting part of it, which one can understand intuitively, is that most of these children don't die because of shell fragments or because of being struck by sniper's bullets or from poison gas; they in fact die from the dispersal that comes with war: being driven away from their homes, from sources of food; the health system collapses; their water sources are far away, and so forth and so on.

And right now, during this latest era of ethnic wars, we seem to find ourselves in a position in which at least 30 of them are going on simultaneously around the globe; there were as many as 36 going on a few months back. And they're terrifically destructive on children. And yet, the number of kids who die from these wars is less than a tenth of the number that die from what we call the silent emergency, the one that never reaches the headlines, the children that die anonymously in rural homes from the dehydration of diarrhoea, or from measles, or from a cough that turns into pneumonia because they have no resistance, their nutrition is so bad.

LITTLEJOHNS: But there's the relation between the two surely, isn't there? I mean, in war situations, you're less able to deal with these problems that make 90 per cent of the --

REID: Oh, the health system is the first to collapse, and then the schools. The schools are bombed, the schools are used as munitions dumps and barracks for the soldiers, and so you definitely do have this. And right now, we find that the menu in our emergency sector has changed completely. It used to be mainly earthquakes, floods, typhoons, famines, some of them man-made; now they're exclusively wars.

ALDAY: I want to ask you, particularly in Latin America, what's your assessment on the future of children in Latin America? I mean, it's hard to have a guess. On the one hand we have the image of a region immersed in free trade and economic reform, and on the other hand we have lots of countries and societies with great disparities. We have seen recent events in southern Mexico and political unrest in Venezuela. How can this gap be shortened in these Latin nations?

REID: Well, one always hopes that democracy is going to bring more social equity. And it doesn't always prove to bring it very fast. By and large the countries in Central and South America are the best off in terms of the quality of life of their children. The infant mortality rates are the lowest, the child mortality rates; the maternal mortality rates are the best. But these huge social disparities do exist, and abandoned children can be found in larger numbers in Latin America than in any of the other regions. We all know about the street children in Brazil, but this is becoming something that's endemic across the continent -- it's also Sao Paulo, it's in many of the other large cities.

And we have a greater gap and greater contrast between the bottom 10 per cent of society and the top 10 per cent in some of the Latin American countries than in any

other countries in the world. And it does have an impact on children. And it does worry us. And we're allying ourselves with religious groupings -- bishops' councils and the like -- business groups, pediatricians' associations, to try to make a grand alliance against these things that undermine the quality of life for kids.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Richard Reid, Director of UNICEF's Division for Public Affairs. Victoria Graham?

GRAHAM: Yes. Mr. Reid, I'd like to ask you about the effect of UN sanctions on children. I think specifically we could look at cases of Iraq and Haiti, and certainly there are others, because increasingly it seems sanctions are being used for political objectives, and these of course have very severe consequences on the population in general, and children. For example, Iraq says -- and I think that this has been borne out by various studies -- that maybe 140,000 children have died as a result of UN sanctions; another 40,000 are suffering malnutrition.

What's your view of this? I mean, do you think that UNICEF and other agencies ought to tell policy-makers and decision-makers that the toll on children is too high?

REID: We have been saying it, and in many ways it goes against the conventional wisdom of the political leadership of the world. You might have seen an article by Peter Steinfels in the New York Times about six days ago --

LITTLEJOHNS: The religion writer.

REID: Yeah. It was an ethics theme and it had to do with the effects of sanctions. And it centred on a study that had been made by an institute in Washington recently, a study that just came out, tracing the effect and impact of sanctions since the turn of the century and showing how small, how minuscule the kinds of effects that the imposers of the sanctions really have on those at whom they're aimed, who are usually an intransigent, reluctant, political leadership. And that, in effect, the sanctions hit the vulnerable portions of the populations, especially children.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is the case in Haiti, I believe.

REID: Yes, it's very definitely the case in Haiti. People have argued against it, but I think there are stark facts that bear out what's being said about the impact there. And we've seen the horrible pictures of people with their bones sticking through their skin and lots of children with bulging eyes and distended bellies and hair turning red because of kwashiorkor, which you're only supposed to see in the worst parts of Africa.

LITTLEJOHNS: Because of what?

REID: Well, kwashiorkor is one of the two main wasting diseases that come with malnutrition. The other is called marasmus.

LITTLEJOHNS: Tropical diseases.

REID: Well, they're diseases that can come with malnutrition anywhere. I've seen them in Iraq. I worked in northern Iraq just after the end of the war, and we were seeing Iraqi children come out with red hair, too.

LITTLEJOHNS: And this is the result of the --

REID: Extreme malnutrition.

LITTLEJOHNS: Because of sanctions against --

REID: Well, at that time, the sanctions weren't working. It's just that society had been so torn apart, and food sources were so scarce among Kurdish children, and kids down in Basra, in southern Iraq, that there just wasn't enough food. Extreme protein calorie malnutrition brings this about. And it's certainly happening in the former Yugoslavia as well. There's just no question about it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Which is also the subject of sanctions.

REID: Yes.

GRAHAM: If I might go back to Iraq a little bit, it seems as though -- I mean, it certainly is the case that the Iraqi government has been painted in very, very black terms by all kinds of western governments and other governments. And this depiction of the government it seems is used as a justification of these sanctions. You were there after the end of the war, like three years ago in the Kurdish area in the north. I've also been there more recently. Not in the north. Can you tell us anything more specific about Iraqi children suffering?

REID: Yes, I can. I don't know about the 140,000, but it might not be far from the truth, and it's also fairly close to the numbers that were in the Harvard study of two-and-a-half years ago. And my guess is that the impact on children outside the Iraqi elite -- and the Iraqi elite class is a fairly large one, all members of the Baath party are well taken care of -- but there are certainly many who fall victim to terrific malnutrition in the country. We know that there are. Not only are there not balanced foods, there just isn't enough food.

But not to make too fine a point of Iraq, I would think that any time that sanctions are imposed in such a general way on a population that already has a tottering economic base, and in circumstances of social collapse, the children are always the first victims. They are simply more vulnerable. They're so much more vulnerable that it's something the world needs to take account of every day.

LITTLEJOHNS: Sanctions are generally imposed by the UN Security Council, Mr. Reid. Has UNICEF tried to do anything to dissuade the Council from adopting this rather extreme course of action?

REID: We have spoken with most of the Council members individually. I have gone down myself to Washington, D.C. to testify before a select committee on hunger, specifically about Iraq, because I was also in Iraq during the war, during the bombing. And yes, we do. At the same time, we realize that there are other reasons that sometimes transcend our arguments. But we stand fast on the fact that sanctions are generally deadly for children. There isn't any way to fine tune them sufficiently, to make sure that the undeserving of this punishment are not the ones mainly hit.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ricardo?

ALDAY: If this crime continues, I mean, if these kinds of problems remain in the lowest places in the international agenda -- I mean, like the poorest people in the poorest countries have been remaining for the last two or three or more decades in this part of the agenda -- what is the risk, what is the outlook for the future?

REID: Well, I think that outlook could be something that President Clinton mentioned when we launched this "State of the World's Children" report in the White House with him and Mrs. Clinton. He said we will reap a bitter harvest of despair, desperation and violence if we don't take care of the world's children, who are the future generation, saying basically the lid will blow off. And we live in such an increasingly interdependent world that we can't afford to let the family in the house four doors down the street become so desperately bad off that they're pushed into violent actions. And one way to assure that that won't be happening is to get at those who are the most accessible, the ones who can respond the most quickly to fairly low-cost solutions, who are the kids.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Reid, I wanted to ask you why this report was released at the White House. Is this customary to go to Washington to release this?

REID: Well, no, not to go to Washington. This is our first time in Washington, though we've done it with presidents almost every year in the twelve years that the "State of the World's Children" report has been coming out. And this year we thought it would be appropriate to do it in the White House. And we did. We were 55 minutes. Mr. James Grant, our Executive Director, spoke and President Clinton spoke. And Hillary Clinton as well. And all of them echoed these basic themes of the "State of the World's Children" report, indicating a real readiness by the United States of America to put its shoulder to the wheel in some of the solutions we're talking about.

Basically we say that these problems that presently beset children can be taken care of through what we refer to as the $25 billion bargain. Now, $25 billion sounds like an astronomical number until you consider that it's what Americans spend on cigarette advertisements in a single year. It's what --

LITTLEJOHNS: Cigarette advertisements.

REID: Yes. And it's what Western Europeans spend on wine in half a year. And so it is a disposable amount of money if the political will is there. And what we're trying to cause more and more governments to see is that political will is necessary if we're going to have a stable future. And also the population side of it is that as more parents become confident that their children won't die, the chances that we will have, a hundred years from now, 12 or 11 billion people on this planet instead of 20 billion are greatly increased.

There is an absolute correlation between a drop in child deaths and a drop in the fertility rate. It seems like an iron demographic law. There is no country that has ever dropped its birth rates before dropping its child death rates. There was a very interesting -- again in the New York Times -- a very interesting article about this two weeks ago that showed that countries that would have seemed to be implausible candidates for such a drop in population rate, such as Bangladesh, had done so beyond any expectations, as parents and families become more aware of the fact that they don't need to make eight babies to have two or three survivors.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mexico has a population program. Is it successful? Ricardo?

ALDAY: Yes, so far I understand it's been successful. But as I said earlier, there are many areas which remain with the remotest results. In some areas we have had great advances, but in many others there are many problems that remain.

I wanted to ask you, do you believe that the re-allocation of international aid to children's programs is needed to reach the mid-term and long-term goals?

REID: Yes, it really is, and it would be so simple. Something that shocks most people is to realize that their governments, in all the foreign assistance they give -- I talk about the Japanese, the Germans, the Americans, the Swedes -- that of the assistance these governments give, on the average, only 7 or 8 per cent goes to what we call human priority needs: nutrition programs, primary education, and basic health. Less than 10 per cent.

And so we have put forth what we call the 20/20 vision: that if the donor countries, the ones who give development assistance, were to give only 20 per cent of what they give to these human priority areas, and the rest to whatever they wanted -- military assistance and the other rather wasteful, certainly not socially beneficial things that so much of the foreign aid goes to -- and on the other hand, reciprocally, if the developing countries would see that 20 per cent of their budgets are allotted to these human development programs.... You know, we have some countries where 40 per cent of the national budget is for defense, which means war. Which means armaments. And those --

LITTLEJOHNS: That still has to be a first priority. After all if you don't defend your country, children are going to be among the most vulnerable group, as you just said.

REID: I think we could have a good debate on that one.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mentioned this huge number of $25 billion. In the few seconds we have left, what is the budget of UNICEF?

REID: Our budget, our field operational budget this year is about $600 million.

LITTLEJOHNS: And how much do you get from this trick or treat and greetings cards program?

REID: Well, a lot comes out of that from our national committees. We have 32 national committees around the world, one in the United States and in all of the industrialized countries, and about a quarter of our income comes from what they bring to us. So it's a sizable amount of money that's up near $200 million.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Reid, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of World Chronicle.

Our guest has been Richard Reid, Director of UNICEF's Division for Public Affairs. He was interviewed by Ricardo Alday of the Mexican News Agency and Victoria Graham of the Associated Press. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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